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# Debate Over the Defense Gap Primarily a Political Matter

The great defense debate produced confusion compounded last week, with Democratic critics seizing on Air Force general's testimony to allege that the United States is entering a period of great danger, and the administration asserting that there is now no "deterrent gap" nor will one be permitted to occur.

President Eisenhower, faced with "a revolt of the bomber generals," blasted their "parochial" views.

After three weeks of slam-bang debate on the status of United States military power vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, the American people have an incontestable right to be confused.

They have heard Democratic leaders in Congress, making pessimistic interpretations of the testimony of Air Force witnesses, charge that the United States is heading for perhaps its most perilous period in history.

They have read newspaper accounts of the same congressional hearings which fail to agree with the import of the military witnesses' testimony.

And they have heard the administration, led by President Eisenhower, counter that the United States has sufficient strength, not only in bombers and ICBMs, but in aircraft carrier planes and submarine-fired missiles, to deter any Soviet surprise attack or, if the Russians act recklessly, to retaliate with enough force to destroy the Soviet Union.

But if the American people are confused they are apparently not alarmed. The fight still is strictly a partisan one. Republican members of Congress are remaining behind the administration. The burden still is on the critics.

Gen. Schriever said any new plan to increase production of the Atlas would have no impact on the so-called "missile gap," the difference in numbers of American and Soviet ICBMs in its most extreme period, in 1962.

The reason: Although production of the Atlas itself could be increased, perhaps quickly, the missile is only 20 per cent of the system. Bases and launching gear, electronic and other equipment require long lead time, anywhere from two to three years.

Gen. Thomas S. Power, chief of the Strategic Air Command, also



SECRETARY GATES  
Mollifier and mediator.

perhaps unintentionally, cast doubt on the wisdom of trying to close the "gap" with fixed-base systems.

## Advances in Design

He said that it was likely there would be continued advances in missile design and techniques that would further improve warhead explosive power, accuracy and reliability. And then he added, significantly:

"Since a missile cannot be recalled once it has been launched, it would be too risky to fire it until there is incontestable proof of aggression. Therefore, our ICBMs probably would have to 'ride out' the initial attack."

This surely means that the first three Atlas squadrons, which will be above-ground, cannot be



GEN. WHITE  
Fuller explanation.

part of the 500-plane B-52 bomber force, he said that 300 Russian ballistic missiles, 150 ICBMs and 150 IRBMs, could virtually wipe out this country's retaliatory force, i.e., that 90 per cent which is dependent on fixed-land bases.

## Demand Alert

Democratic Senators Symington of Missouri and Jackson of Washington seized upon the Power plea to demand an immediate airborne alert to keep a sizable number, perhaps 100-150, long-range bombers in the air 24 hours a day to protect it against a surprise missile attack. Senator Johnson of Texas supported the idea indirectly.

But Mr. Eisenhower made it plain he has no intention of instituting such a desperate move unless new intelligence reports demonstrate its clear necessity. Meanwhile, he has asked for \$90 million to help the Air Force stock extra aircraft engines and train crews for this kind of emergency.

The President explained in a message to Congress last month that an airborne alert is not now wise or necessary. Last week, at a news conference, he bristled at Gen. Power's recommendation and the general's reaffirmation after Mr. Gates had called it "unrealistic." He said:

"There are too many of these generals (who) have all sorts of ideas. . . I cannot be particularly disturbed because everybody with a parochial viewpoint all over the place comes along . . . and says that the bosses know nothing about it."

Gen. Thomas L. White, Air Force Chief of Staff, later testified in secret before the combined Senate Preparedness and Space Committees on the subject.

Chairman Johnson told reporters that Gen. White, at any rate, by the end of 1961, there should be a minimum of five Polaris submarines at sea and not vulnerable to surprise missile attack, armed with a total of 90 hydrogen weapons. This is enough, perhaps, to atomize 45 Russian cities.

The cost of the airborne alert of 100 B-52 bombers has been estimated from \$600 million to \$1.2 billion a year. But a clearer idea of the cost may be gained by these peacetime operating expenses: \$340 an hour per aircraft for fuel; \$12,000 for maintenance per

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